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ABSTRACT

As a result of court rulings and legislation which make it illegal to discriminate among children, but also illegal not to identify children who have educational handicaps, school psychologists are seen to face a role crisis in the education of handicapped children. Recommended for those working with the severely retarded are two types of services: administration and interpretation of educationally related assessments, and consultation in implementing a prescriptive program based on the assessment. Diagrammed is a model to train psychologists as change agents. (CL)

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THE PSYCHOLOGIST AS A CHANGE-AGENT IN PROVIDING IN-SERVICE TRAINING TO STAFF MEMBERS SERVING SCHOOL-AGED SEVERELY RETARDED

Submitted to:

The Council for Exceptional Children

May 26, 1977

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ABSTRACT

Modern day school psychologists are caught in a dilemma, threatening their professional status. This condition has developed because of court decisions to identify children and the ambiguity created by the demand not to label them, by the anti-testing movement, and by the influence of other professionals infringing on areas of assessment once the school psychologist's exclusive domain.

Hope may be in sight, if the school psychologist, and especially those working with severely retarded children are willing to assume new roles. This role includes two major foci (a) administration and interpretation of educationally relevent assessments and, (b) assisting in the implementation of a program based on this assessment. By providing these two services, the psychologist working with severely handicapped children and staff in those centers, will enhance his credibility with staff, improve the competence of the staff in the centers and increase the level of skill acquisition on the part of the children served.

School psychologists of the 20th Century may rightly envision themselves as an endangered species. They may easily feel unloved and unlovely (Kirp & Kirp, 1976). Endangered because some of their colleagues and administrators frequently devalue their utility. Their utility is viewed only as they are a provider of quasi-scientific interpretation of tests which allow for decisions to be made regarding placement of children (Kirp & Kirp, 1976). Decisions which are alleged to be in the best interest of the child, but which, in the view of some, may rid a class or a school of troublesome, if not troubled child.

Administrators regard the psychologist as a luxury item in their budgets (Kirp & Kirp, 1976), the last to be hired and the first to depart in periods of budgetary stress. They are perceived as a luxury perhaps for one major reason. The law in most states specifies what the psychologist in the schools "must do", and delegates to the psychologist alone certain prerogatives regarding I.Q. testing (Bennett and Bardon, 1975). The inherent message in the "must" and the reimbursement to school districts for psychological services, is that, if their prerogratives were not mandated they would have no cause to be employed. If I.Q. testing were to be banned nationally as it is in California, the psychologists position would be in serious jeopardy (Larry P. vs Riles, 1972). Should the laws regarding placement based on test results obtained by a psychologist be changed to allow for other professionals or groups of professionals to be responsible for placement decisions, it is suggested that a substantial number of school districts would not voluntarily employ psychologists at the direct expense of the tax-paying public.

Many special education school personnel regard school psychologists as peripheral to their daily offering of services. This perception is perpetuated as psychologists allow their daily efforts to be limited to testing and report

writing (Bennett and Bardon, 1975). And, usually this is a report which is limited to justification for a child's placement and which seldom, if ever, contains material readily translatable by the teacher into educational strategies.

Feelings of displacement and disorientation may be further enhanced by the dilemma created by P.L. 93-380 Title VI Part B. Herein the psychologist is required to identify children in need of special education services so that those services may be provided them. However, as a result of court decisions attempting to correct inequities in placement procedures, schools are told that they should not put these children in special education classes but should "mainstream" them. (Bennett & Bardon, 1975).

Pennsylvania Law as cited by Steinbeck et al., (1975), requires that all children needing special services be identified, they may not however be labeled. Thus, school psychologists are hard-pressed to determine how it is possible to identify children needing specific help without pointing out those children who are different from those who need help. The means of identification of children needing special services, of necessity, requires that we be able to come up with some measure of deficit.

And, so, we are confronted with a not-so-devine paradox whereas it is illegal to discriminate among children, but it is illegal not to identify children who have educational handicaps (Bennett & Bardon, 1975).

Special education administration further compounds the psychologists dilemma by requiring that a particular label be assigned to a child in order for the child to receive special attention. The rubric is categorical funding.

Solutions (Kuriloff, 1975) suggests that psychologists have two alternatives for obtaining respite from their anguish.

They may define their roles narrowly. They may adhere to the letter of the law in their placement decisions, casting aside pressure from teachers and principals who would have the child removed. They may set aside their own insights and make their judgments not on what makes good educational sense, but on organizational demands to statuatory labeling criteria. Where does this leave the psychologist? Well, if the decision results in a child's being moved from a regular to a special class, then the organizational demand for the removal of a disturbing child is met, appreciation is expressed to the psychologist by people he depends upon for approval and support. But, if on the other hand, the decision, requires that a child be maintained in a regular class, the likelihood of hostility and pressure from these same previously supporting elements grow. By adhering to the letter of the law, and being reasonably assured that their placements are defensible in court, the psychologist can retreat to the narrowly defined demensions of standard deviations.

The psychologists who define their roles broadly will find that correct decisions for the removal of the identified child will protect them as well as their peers who perceive their roles narrowly. Correct decisions to leave children in regular classes will heap upon the broadly-defined psychologist the same complaints levied upon his narrowly-defined peer. The difference is that our broadly-defined psychologists do not see their role as being set. They perceive in the teachers and administrators frustration an opportunity for consultation services.

We would contend as does (Kuriloff, 1975) that to the extent that this consultation, which we perceive as in-service training, helps teachers overcome problems which teachers define as being important, will psychologists be appreciated and their services sought after. We would further contend that

to the extent that the psychologist can communicate strategies for defusing educational problems in young children, thereby precluding the necessity for referral will they be an asset to the administration.

Lambert (1973) traced the traditional sources of the schools psychologists' value to the school to their ability to accurately assess individual differences and to identify special educational needs and develop appropriate programs for meeting them.

School psychologists have indeed shown their ability to accurately assess individual differences and special educational needs. They have, in most instances, fallen short however, in their ability to develop and provide teachers with appropriate programs for meeting these needs. Lambert's appraisal must be taken several steps further if psychologists are to continue to justify their positions in the school.

A new day need dawn for the school psychologist. The plethora of court cases, the passage of P.L. 94-142, state legislation mandating programs for children and adults, all demand that the school psychologist wear a variety of professional "hats". These new, emerging roles include (1) retention of the school psychologist as a primary diagnostician for children of all ages (usually 3-21), and (2) writer of educational programs based on diagnostic information, and (3) provider of in-service training to those working with severely and profoundly retarded and those engaged in the massive mainstreaming effort under P.L. 94-142. Additionally, the school psychologist is to put much more into an intermediary position wherein he must attend to and respond to not only parents and teachers, but the child and his program development as well.

As the primary diagnostician, the school psychologist will be asked, in the future, to give greater emphasis to diagnosis and consultation,

comprehensive behavioral evaluations, learning processes and psychological states. (Woody, 1976)

In working with administrators and teachers of severely and profoundly retarded children, the school psychologist must provide inservice training in the assessment and training of these children in such skill areas as reasoning and problem-solving, language development, gross motor, self-help, and pre-vocational skills. The psychologist must be able to demonstrate how specific skill deficits are assessed and be able to develop a training program based on such deficits. In his new role, the school psychologist must be able to "show" as well as "tell".

Thus, in order for today's psychologists to respond to the educational needs of severely handicapped children and the staff who serve them it is imperative that they develop two interdependent skills. These skills are:

1. Administration and Interpretation of Educationally Relevant Assessments:

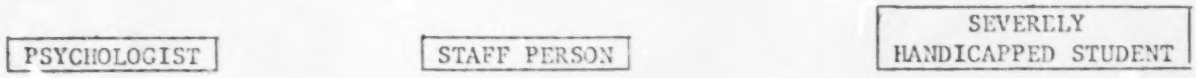
   These kinds of assessments are being demanded by instructional persons and, as indicated previously, the psychologist is uniquely suited to do the job. (Meyers, 1973)

2. Assisting in the Implementation of the Prescribed Program:

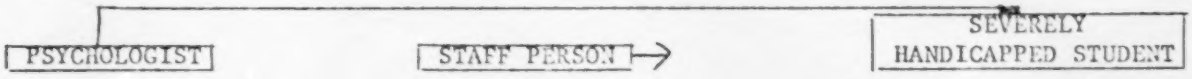
   Even with educationally relevant assessments, the traditional procedure of assessment, report writing, and interpretation of results falls short of what is required for the programs under consideration. There is a need for the psychologist to test the validity of his prescribed program with the student and make necessary adjustments with the assistance of those

who know the student best before it can be expected that the prescribed program will be implemented. A training model for the actualization of the psychologist's role as a change-agent has been developed by Burke and Rowland, (1971). The model is referred to as the Active Response Inservice Training Method (ARITM) and consists of six main steps.

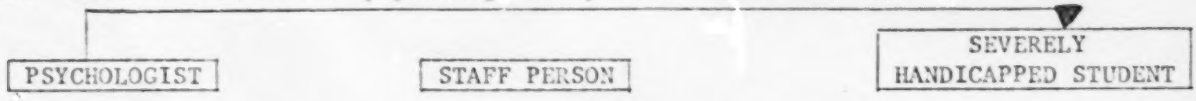
As each step is taken, various interactions may occur between the people involved. In the model being discussed here, the people would be the school psychologist, the staff person, and the severely handicapped student.



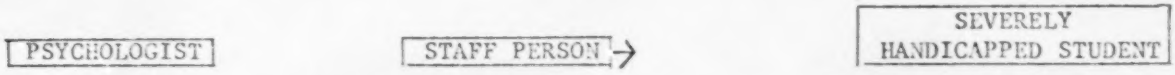
1. The first step is the identification and behavioral statement of the problem of area of interest to the staff person. Concerns are always stated specifically and behaviorally.



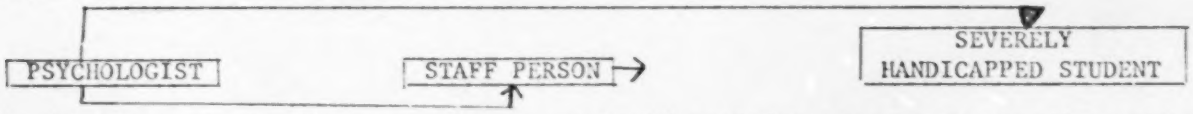
2. The second step is the assessment of the severely retarded student's performance in the area of concern. This assessment may be informal or formal, depending on the concern. The school psychologist may assess the student,



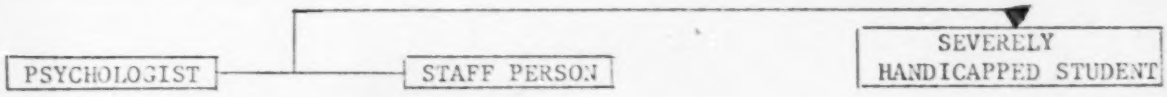
or, the staff person or parent may assess the student,



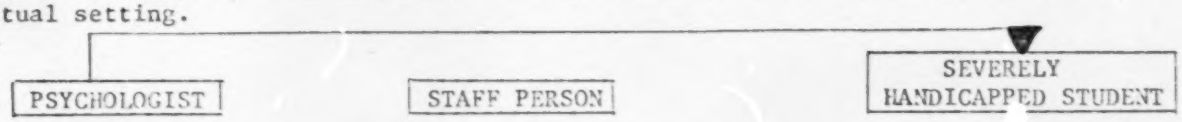
or, the school psychologist, using the ARITM, may want to teach the staff person or parent to assess the student.



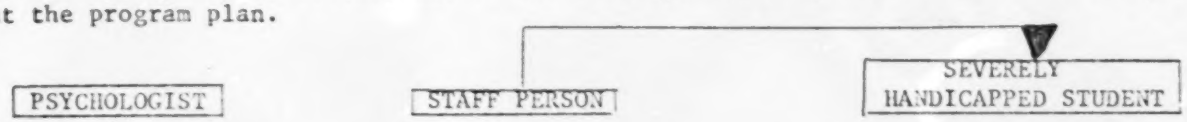
3. The third step is to design an assessment-based training program to remediate the area of concern. The psychologist and the instructional person or parent need to work together in the development of the program if the plan is to be carried out by the instructional aide or parent.



4. The fourth step is a demonstration of the program plan with the student in the actual setting.



5. The fifth step is the development of the staff person or parent's skills in carrying out the program plan.



6. The sixth step is the follow-up with the staff person or parent as the program is implemented.

(Burke & Rowland, 1971)

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